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U.S. Envoy in Moscow in Middle of Storm

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Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, June 24 — For the United States Ambassador to Moscow, Malcolm Toon, the United States-Soviet summit meeting in Vienna a week ago was an unhappy experience.

The 62-year-old career diplomat, known to Soviet and American officials alike for his hard-line, bluntly expressed political views, was stunned to learn when he arrived in Vienna June 13 that he was about to be replaced by a businessman, Thomas J. Watson Jr., former chairman of the International Business Machines Corporation.

Last Friday, Mr. Toon stunned the White House by refusing to make an unqualified endorsement of the strategic arms limitation treaty signed by the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, and President Carter in Vienna a week ago. First, he said in a statement for the press reflecting privately expressed views as well, he would have to satisfy himself in Washington that the treaty was in fact verifiable, as the President has often maintained it is.

Some of those who know the white-haired, ruddy-faced diplomat and avid golfer well believe he has no intention whatever of joining the ranks of the treaty's opponents. He said himself on Friday that his "show me" mission to Washington beginning July 6 would probably convince him it is verifiable. "I'd say the odds are pretty good," he said.

Administration Needs Votes

His stance comes at a moment when the Carter Administration needs every vote it can get in the Senate, which has to approve the treaty before it can go into effect.

And the Ambassador himself played a major role in negotiating the treaty terms, up to last December, when Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei A. Gromyko, had their last pre-summit meeting on the treaty in Geneva.

Why then, Mr. Toon's friends and associates here ask, is he playing hard to get all of a sudden?

They have two answers.

Mr. Toon argues that since the loss of Central Intelligence Agency monitoring facilities because of the revolution in Iran last winter there has been a legitimate question whether the United States can monitor Soviet missile tests and verify their compliance with the treaty.

Problem Goes Back Months

The C.I.A. has said that the lost facilities could be partly replaced by U-2 reconnaissance flights out of Turkey, but the Turks have said they would agree only if the Soviet Union said it did not object.



Associated Press

Malcolm Toon

Still, the problem of the lost bases in Iran has existed for several months, and Mr. Toon's reservations were first expressed the day the treaty was signed in Vienna June 18. Some of Mr. Toon's colleagues believe there are other, personal reasons for his behavior.

The Ambassador has felt left out by the Carter Administration since the turn of the year, when Mr. Vance personally took charge of negotiating the last stages of the arms treaty through the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, Anatoly F. Dobrynin.

Mr. Toon thought this was the wrong way to operate. Whatever Mr. Dobrynin was told in Washington, he told the State Department, should be "double tracked" through the United States Ambassador in Moscow. The American interest was best served, he argued, if he had as much access to top Kremlin officials as Mr. Dobrynin had to top White House and State Department figures in Washington.

"He was telling Vance he was doing it all wrong," a State Department official said, "and it didn't sit well."

Three Decades of Diplomacy

Mr. Toon's views were forged over three decades of professional diplomatic work in Eastern Europe, Washington, and Moscow. He often sounded not like a diplomat but like the Navy PT-boat commander he was before he joined the Foreign Service in 1946.

He has often said he does not trust the Russians and they do not trust him. Moscow did not accede to his appointment here in 1976 for several months. Last summer, the Communist Party newspaper took him to task for saying there was racism and lack of political justice in the Soviet Union. This was on a lecture tour of the United States to drum up support for the arms treaty.

Gromyko. Soviet officials suggested the feisty envoy be kept out of the discussions. Mr. Vance kept him in. The Ambassador is not a man who forgets personal slights, or forgives them easily.

When the Secretary of Agriculture, Bob Bergland, came here a year ago on a tour of Soviet breadbasket regions, Mr. Toon insisted on his own limousine, flying the American flag. Only the Ambassador, he pointedly reminded the Cabinet officer's staff, is the President's personal representative here.

Mr. Toon said recently, talking of plans to retire this summer, "It would be a gross mistake" to appoint a businessman instead of a professional diplomat to the Moscow post.

According to close friends, he fully expected his replacement to be another career man, Harry G. Barnes Jr., who had served in Moscow years ago and is now working at the State Department in Washington.

Yet in Vienna, at the elegant Staatsoper, there was Mr. Watson, a businessman suggested to Mr. Carter by W. Averell Harriman. Mr. Harriman, an influential Democrat, was also a businessman before he became Ambassador to Moscow during World War II, and he thought Mr. Toon was unnecessarily and harmfully antagonistic to his Soviet hosts.

It was then that Mr. Toon suddenly developed his doubts about the verification of the treaty.

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